

Testimony of Aisha Gambrell
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358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515
Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee
March 24th, 2011

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee:

Hello, my name is Aisha Gambrell, and I am alum of Common Ground High School. I graduated last year as valedictorian of my class. Although I am a very good student, I can attribute some of my greatness to being a student of Common Ground. When I entered as a freshman, I was a shy, meek little girl from a public school where I was tormented and bullied every day. No one ever did anything about it, and it really demolished my self-esteem. But within the first week at Common Ground I had friends! And they remained my friends until we graduated. As time went on, I was able to come out of the shell I had been trapped in for so long. I was able to perform at Common Ground's annual talent show my sophomore year. By the spring of last year, I was nothing compared to my freshman year. I was happier, more outspoken, and a true leader.

However, none of this would have been possible without the help and support from the staff and teachers at Common Ground. They knew who I was, they got to know me as a person, pushed me to do my very best and helped me with my weaknesses; I was a student and not a number like I would have been at a much larger high school.

Charter schools are unique beyond comparison; they are small and individualized. The teachers are able to provide one-on-one attention to any student who may need it, plus additional help for special needs students. Charter schools are perfect for students like myself who may not perform as well as they could if they were in a larger school setting. I grew so much from being a student at Common Ground but to find out that neither I nor my graduating class cohort had the money

that we were entitled to, money that should have followed us from the from public schools we previously attended, makes me very upset. We were short changed in the long run, missing out on a lot of things that seniors hope for in their senior year. Not only that, but that additional money could've helped us make the school better in ways we've wanted since the beginning.

Now, to see my youngest sister in the 10th grade, and knowing that her money did not follow her either makes me even more upset. This is her future, and she is right with me as part of the generation who may save the world. But, this may not happen if charter schools like Common Ground don't start receiving the same money per student that public schools receive. This should not have to be a competition, it's for the children. And New Haven has the biggest emphasis on "Kids First" and follows "No Child Left Behind" but this is not putting kids first by any means and is totally leaving many children behind. This needs to start happening now.

This phasing in timeline of ten years is not going to work. Thousands of children throughout this 10 year phase will miss out on money that may prove to be beneficial to their education. Yes, the issue here is money, but this should not overshadow the fact that children are children, they deserve a proper education, and money in this sense should not prevent that from happening.

Please support Senate Bill 1195 that will provide equitable funding for Connecticut's charter schools.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Aisha Gambrell